

Tony Saich and Biliang Hu, *Chinese Village, Global Market: New Collectives and Rural Development*, China in Transition series, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 234 pp., figure, tables, index. ISBN: 978-1-137-03514-1 (hardcover).

This monograph presents a unique and fascinating, historically anchored account of how a traditional, fairly isolated village in China's southeastern rural hinterlands, Yantian village in Dongguan City, Guangdong Province, became a small boomtown during the reform period beginning in the late 1970s. It focuses on the dynamic interaction between policy initiatives emanating from the centre in Beijing and the response at the village level to address and exploit these initiatives to promote local political, economic and social development in the interests of the local elites. The authors show how the dominant lineage of the village, the Dengs – who accounted for 80 per cent of the population in 1949 and 61.1 per cent in 2006 (pp. 65-66) – managed to stay in control of the process.

The authors analyse the transformation of Yantian from an agriculture-based economy to an economy based on industry and services. This development was dominated by foreign-invested, export-oriented enterprises and their need for a variety of support and services. The authors use multiple empirical sources gathered since the late 1970s. They had prime access to key political and economic actors and to the records of the village, while also undertaking specific case studies and bringing in data and analysis from different quantitative surveys undertaken for different purposes over the years. A number of tables synthesize the relevant data.

The book is divided into two sections. The first part focuses on economic development and the changing organization and management of the economy at the collective and household levels, especially the rise of new types of collectives, for example shareholding collectives, and the private sector. The second part presents detailed studies of the provision of public goods, i.e. education and health. It also includes a highly informative and insightful chapter on the organization and management of village governance. The analysis of Yantian's 'village democracy', which is partly based on personal participation and observation, of the increasingly serious attempts at promoting transparency in governance, and of the power structures dominating local governance, adds new insights to our understanding of local political dynamics in China. In contrast to most other studies, Saich and Hu have integrated this analysis into their longitudinal examination of local economic development and

organization and this helps shed light on how 'networked governance' and 'interlocking directorates' can function in rural China.

The authors also analyse the internal economic and political inequalities within the original resident community as well as between the high number of in-migrants and the minority of original residents. One of the reasons for in-migrants being treated unequally is of course the *hukou* system. The causes and consequences are analysed in detail, not least in the chapters on education and health. However, Saich and Hu also find that the in-migrants are increasingly being treated as ordinary, although this happens at a very late stage of development.

The main findings of the study are that the changes over time, driven by central policies as they were, did not provoke particularly innovative responses in Yantian. Had Yantian not had successful migrants in Hong Kong who were interested in supporting their lineage companions in the home village while also aiming at exploiting the new investment opportunities in the Pearl River Delta Region under Deng Xiaoping's regime, Yantian might not have developed along the path-dependent trajectory it did, with elite members of the Deng lineage in firm control of key economic and political organizations in the village. In- and out-migration was another key driver. The village could seek remittances from out-migrants and rents from in-migrants. The study also makes it amply clear that the higher administrative levels accepted the Deng lineage as a dominant local power institution and a useful partner, thus giving up on original Communist intentions to suppress the influence of lineages. Finally, the capitalization of land was a strong driver in Yantian's evolving economic prosperity. To manage these extraordinary developments, the successive village leaderships headed by elite Deng lineage members proved extremely adaptive while also being able to serve their own interests.

The authors are not explicit with regard to their theoretical anchorage or their methodology. However, the study situates itself within the field of regional political economy. As such, it is one of the most impressive longitudinal studies available of political and economic development in contemporary rural China based on multiple methods over such a long period of time.

While the study is empirically rich, excellent in tracing development trajectories, and solid when analyzing and synthesizing them, there are elements of the analysis that are thinly based, especially when critical information is from partisan interviewees or written sources, like Deng Yaohui's history of the village. While partisan data may be difficult to

validate, a critical reflection on this dilemma would have been helpful. Furthermore, the sheer richness of empirical data and the lack of synthetic sections in parts of the study make it read like a consultant's report at times. In addition, a more critical angle on the study of the Deng lineage as local elites would have been welcome. It has been demonstrated in many studies that the capitalization of village resources in China's rural areas has provided opportunities for rent seeking by local elites. This aspect is not well covered in this study. Finally, in contrast to the authors, I would argue that the combination of public and private interest, with new carefully managed business-oriented collectives taking charge of the village assets and paying dividends to original residents while effectively excluding outsiders, is not a unique aspect of the 'Yantian model'. This approach is being pursued around China.

These are minor quibbles and Saich and Hu's study is clearly a substantial and welcome addition to the broader field of rural development studies in China. What we can learn is that the unique combination of public and private interest and its institutional underpinnings have delivered significant development in the rural areas of the Pearl River Delta. The study also provides unique insights and analysis that help us better understand how 'models' like the 'Yantian model' can be explored to study similar developments in other parts of China.

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